

SEPTEMBER 1998

TERRORISM

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TR 98-009

10/26-Lien
APPROVED FOR RELEASE
DATE: JAN 2005

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September 1998

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Latin America



Guerrillas in Colombia Release Two US Hostages ☐

Colombia's two principal guerrilla groups—the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN)—each released a US hostage in September. Three New Tribes Missionaries, kidnapped by the FARC in January 1993, remain the only US citizens held captive in Colombia, if they are still alive.

- The FARC's 53rd Front released Donald Lee Cary on 6 September. Guerrillas kidnapped Cary in March and refused to free him after the family paid a ransom in June. The family may have paid an additional ransom.
- The ELN's Jose Solano Sepulveda Front released US geologist Donald Riedel on 18 September after holding him for 20 months. His family paid at least \$885,000 in ransom. ☐
- The FARC kidnapped US missionaries Mark Rich, David Mankins, and Rick Tenenoff in January 1993. The terrorists have not provided proof of life since 1994, but information from a captured guerrilla indicates that the hostages were alive in FARC captivity in early 1996. However, FARC leaders have repeatedly denied that they kidnapped the US missionaries.
- The Colombian Government's anti-kidnapping czar, Ruben Dario Ramirez, has declared the New Tribes Missionaries "legally disappeared and probably dead." ☐

The insurgents' motive for releasing US hostages is unclear. The FARC probably released Cary because he was in poor health, and his family already had paid a ransom. The ELN may have freed Riedel when it realized his family had exhausted its financial resources. The releases probably were not intended as gestures of good will toward US citizens.

- ☐ however, on 22 September the ELN made an overture through a representative of Spain's Socialist Party to establish contact with the US Government. The ELN probably did not free Riedel because it wanted to open a dialogue with Washington, but once the last US hostage was released, the ELN may have perceived an opportunity to develop contacts with US officials and enhance its legitimacy while it embarks on a peace process with Bogota. ☐

The release of the hostages does not signal a reduced threat to US interests in Colombia. An exact hostage count is not available, but multiple sources indicate that the FARC and ELN continue to hold collectively well over 300 hostages and have not renounced terrorist activity or pledged to refrain from kidnapping US citizens. ☐

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